

# SHOUHARDO II

## Gender Strategy Review and Recommendations



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## Acronyms

BRAC	:Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAP	:Community Action Plan
CBHQ	:CARE Bangladesh Head-Quarters
CBO	:Community Based Organization
COVAW	: Cost of Violence Against Women
ECCD	:Early Child Care for Development
EKATA	:Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action
EVAW	:Ending Violence Against Women
FGD	:Focus Group Discussion
GA	:Gender Analysis
GBV	:Gender Based Violence
HH	:Household
IGA	:Income Generating Activity
M&E	:Monitoring and Evaluation
MCHN	:Mother and Child Health and Nutrition
MTR	:Mid-Term Review
NNPC	:Nari Nirjaton Protirodh Committee (Prevention Committee on VAW)
PEP	:Poor and Extreme Poor
REFLECT	:Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
RMP	:Rural Maintenance Project
SC	:Standing Committee (of the Union Parishad)
SHOUHARDO II	:Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities Phase II
SO	:Strategic Objective
TOC	:Theory of Change
TOR	:Terms of Reference
UNO	:Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	:Union Parishad
VAW	:Violence Against Women
VDC	:Village Development Committee
(WE) SII	:(Women's Empowerment) Strategic Impact Inquiry

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

The demand for equality for women in Bangladeshi society is not new. Yet change has been slow, an outcome of the deeply patriarchal nature of the society, intertwined with socially conservative religious interpretations. Women's status within Bangladesh remains extremely unequal to men, and seeking to address the associated issues has become a central focus of the programmatic work of CARE Bangladesh.

The SHOUHARDO II project is highly ambitious in the scope and scale of its intent. By working with women and men from over 370,000 poor and extreme poor households, it aims to change the lives of upwards of 1.5 million people. In attempting to address the underlying causes of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, SHOUHARDO II recognizes that empowering women is a foundational pathway to achieving lasting progress. A strong focus has been on seeking to improve women's ability to influence decision-making and reduce violence against women.

In the November 2012 Mid-Term Review it was noted that, 'Although strong progress has been achieved on ending violence against women, additional focus and attention is necessary to address women's decision making power, mobility and to free them from detrimental patriarchal beliefs.'

This report is intended to provide recommendations to aid the development of this additional focus. Its central aim is: To identify and recommend new/innovative strategies for addressing the community level gender barriers (across all strategic program objectives and for EKATA/ non-EKATA sites) for women's empowerment, especially in relation to women's decision making and freedom of movement.

### **Methodology**

During a 10 day period in October 2013, two consultants from WayFair visited various locations in Rangpur District in the Rangpur region in the north-west, Dhormopasha Upazila in Mymensingh in the north, and Teknaf Upazila in the extreme south-east. During these visits the consultants met with women only EKATA (and one MCHN) groups, mixed VDC groups, and one UP in each of Dhormopasha and Teknaf. The consultants encouraged participants to talk about what they valued about the project and the changes that had taken place in their lives. In order to help appreciate the magnitude of the changes that had taken place, the consultants also talked about some of the challenges they had faced and how they had attempted to address these.

### **SHOUHARDO II's Approach to Women's Empowerment**

The overall strategy for SHOUHARDO II is built upon a women's empowerment foundation. Thus it is based on the assumption that addressing food insecurity and child malnutrition is strongly correlated with empowering women.

The overwhelming feature about SHOUHARDO II is the scale at which it works. In the current five year phase it is working across 1509 villages, and in order to do so SHOUHARDO II's strategy is reliant predominantly upon community level CBOs, and associated group work processes.

In its work on women's empowerment, there are four areas where SHOUHARDO II has focused its efforts (indicators) at the local level:

1. Women's access to and control over income and resources.
2. Women and children, specially girl child's health care (nutrition, treatment, reproductive)
3. Violence against women (at Family and Community level).
4. Women leadership (in family, at different committee at community level).

Actions to address these four areas have been implemented variously across all the 1509 villages, in most cases involving men as well as women, but particularly in the 30% of villages, 513 in total, where women only EKATA groups have been established. Across all the villages, the mixed Village Development Committees (VDCs), are also central to the work on addressing the issues of gender inequality.

### **SHOUHARDO II's Women's Empowerment Work**

During the visits to groups across the three regions the consultants noticed that there was a lot of consistency between them (except for the last group which they visited in an extremely conservative part of Teknaf). This is probably one of SHOUHARDO II's biggest overall successes, its cumulative effect at scale, especially when placed in historical context.

### **Changes**

As a result of the training and the information provided to them through it, as well as the support provided for particular income generating activities (through the VDCs), most of the women in the EKATA (and VDC) groups they visited identified positive changes occurring in their lives. Some of these main changes were as follows.

- Improvements in their lives stemming from either their increased incomes or food security, achieved through their access to resources provided through the range of activities groups are implementing with SHOUHARDO II support.
- Their improved ability to earn income increases the respect they receive from husbands and families, leading to an improved role in decision-making and reduced violence
- Attending groups results in health and education benefits too for children – and this also leads to increased acceptance of their attending group meetings by husbands and mothers-in-law
- Improved nutrition status for children, due to improved knowledge and food availability
- Information about the legislation against early marriage is delaying marriages – and seen as improving women and children's health, since they are not giving birth as teenagers.

- Girls are returning to education (though this is often *madrasas*, since they haven't passed the Grade 5 exams that would enable them to return to state schools, and because in some areas they are the nearest available school).
- Volunteers and field facilitator are benefiting in particular from capacity building and demonstrate the greatest levels of personal empowerment, i.e. they are often showing the more profound levels of personal change. This was exemplified in accounts provided of their increased ability to negotiate with husbands/ families, and others, to delay their marriages and complete their education, and to use information to pursue their own priorities.

An area of strength is the work on gender relationships and in terms of alternative role models and attitudes towards gendered power relations, is through the VDCs. The VDCs support the EKATA groups too, so although changes in household gender relationships are taking place, as EKATA group members bring their new knowledge, incomes and group solidarity into their homes, it is nevertheless the confirmatory attitudes of the male VDC members that are validating these changes.

### Limitations

SHOUHARDO II has most clearly focused on agency level change. This is evidenced through the accounts of the women in the EKATA, MCHN and VDC groups. This is a good starting point, and their lives have benefited, since SHOUHARDO II is providing capacity building, training, and assets, and these have all been taken on, valued and utilized. And there have been changes in their household gender relationships too. Yet deeper changes in cultural attitudes and social institutions have yet to occur.

### Recommendations

Below is a summary of recommendations endorsed by the SHOUHARDO II management team that can be implemented during the remaining life span of SHOUHARDO II.

#### 1. Deepening Understanding of Women's Inequality and Consequences

SHOUHARDO II to promote additional forms of analysis that help communities to understand the consequences of retaining harmful cultural practices which affects both the families and communities. In the short term, with the EKATA groups, the best way to trial this is to pilot a training exercise with a batch of community facilitators. Topics are:

- ❖ Complacency around dowry.
- ❖ Violence by men against women is not justified in any respect – but the commodification of women leads to it.
- ❖ Greater encouragement and further investment in girls completing their education.
- ❖ The benefits of delaying marriage as long as possible need to be discussed in a rounded fashion in the EKATA groups, going beyond just the health aspects.



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## *2. EKATA Groups: Piloting additional training for Community Facilitators and Volunteers*

A consistent recommendation for SHOUHARDO II, included in the Mid-Term Review, and also in the earlier 2009 women's empowerment thematic review has been to develop further the capacities of the SHOUHARDO II facilitators and volunteers. The challenge here though is that presently volunteers are delivering content provided to them, rather than facilitating more discovery based processes. The most feasible approach would be to select a group of community facilitators and volunteers in one or more of SHOUHARDO II's regions, and train them in a more activist methodology. This can draw from the CO's experience in developing 'natural leaders' and encouraging them to become a cadre of community activists.

## *3. Linking the EKATA Groups to other Organizations and Networks*

The most challenging task for SHOUHARDO II is to evolve a longer term vision for the EKATA groups within the remaining 18 months of the project life span. With 513 EKATA groups having been formed, they need to be linked as much as possible into appropriate types of networks before the end of the current funding period of SHOUHARDO II. The two most important factors related to this are:

- a) the self belief, capabilities and sense of solidarity generated amongst the members, and
- b) the extent to which the groups come to be linked with some form of supporting networks, movements or federations.

## *4. Engaging Men*

More systematic engagement with men within the villages where SHOUHARDO II is operating is one of the final areas for short term improvement. This should be done by engaging more effectively with VDC and UP.

### *-Village Development Committees*

The role of the VDCs vital. A 6-5 or 5-6 split between men and women members provides a sound basis for healthy exchanges between men and women members, leading to a significant change in attitudes of the VDC male members

### *- Promoting women leaders in UPs as support base for other women in communities*

A second area of broader engagement required at the local level with respect to women's empowerment issues, is with the Union Parishads. Women have no existing power base at the union level, so if they are to have a real voice there, they need an active support constituency – which requires the existence of some kind of support forum at union level, as has been recommended.

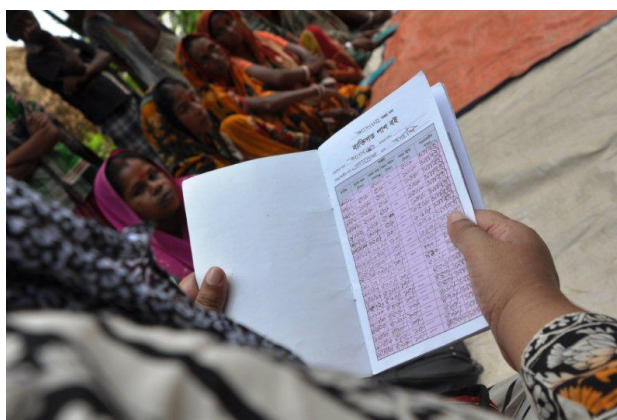
## *5. Engaging with national women's movement actors and organizations*

Finally, SHOUHARDO II needs to establish more of a presence at national level with respect to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, in coordination with the CO's women's empowerment program



*Having the willingness or determination to walk beside men is a must in our journey through lives, and we should believe that we are not slaves. We shall do whatever needs to be done in order to achieve equality... We demand the type of equality that should exist in family between boys and girls, as men are the sons of society, and we are the daughters.<sup>1</sup>*

With the advent of organisations like Grameen and BRAC, it became more common for women to be organised into groups for micro-finance purposes. Yet, this organisation did not necessarily amount to the empowerment of these women. Rural women still rarely demonstrate or organise effectively for their rights, for instance. Whereas they have now begun to emerge from their homes more, and their income generating roles more widely recognised – even if not yet in the south-east - rural women still have very limited access to productive assets. Recently a Women's Empowerment in



<sup>1</sup> Ghulam Murshid, 1993, *Rasasundari Theke Rokeya: Naripragatir Ek Sha Bachhar (Hundred Years of Women's Progress: From Rasshundori to Rokeya)*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka.

Agricultural Index has been developed and piloted by IFPRI, with USAID support, using a set of 10 indicators, which can be correlated with CARE's own A-S-R model, discussed in section 4.

In their initial piloting of the index, IFPRI confirmed in their conclusion that policies and programs should 'address the three domains that contribute most to disempowerment: weak leadership in the community, lack of control over resources, and lack of control over income'.<sup>2</sup> CARE itself has joined the list of organisations that, especially in the last decade, has encouraged the empowerment of women in mixed and women-only CBOs seeking to address these three domains, and localised change is evident. But changing a deeply patriarchal culture, where resource access is often regulated by patronage based relationships, is a daunting challenge.

## **2. The Role of SHOUHARDO II**

The SHOUHARDO II project is highly ambitious in the scope and scale of its intent. By working with women and men from over 370,000 poor and extreme poor households, it aims to change the lives of upwards of 1.5 million people. In attempting to address the underlying causes of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, SHOUHARDO II recognizes that empowering women is the foundational pathway to achieving lasting progress.



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Altogether SHOUHARDO II operates in 1509 villages, and in 30% of these women's only EKATA groups have been formed, which are the main (but not only) vehicle through which SHOUHARDO II is pursuing women's empowerment. In the start up phase for SHOUHARDO II a gender analysis was carried out across these villages which showed that: 'socio-cultural norms and stereotypes regarding women still undermine ongoing empowerment efforts. The society still remains highly patriarchal and

hierarchical with strong traditional norms that value men more and continue to marginalize women. Disparities between men and women and violence in households act as a deterrent for economic development and sustain poverty.<sup>3</sup>

There are four areas, all at the local level, that SHOUHARDO II's work on women's empowerment has focused upon:

1. Women's access to and control over income and resources.

<sup>2</sup> Esha Sraboni, Agnes R. Quisumbing, and Akhter U. Ahmed, 2013, 'The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index: Results from the 2011-2012 Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey, Dhaka, IFPRI.

<sup>3</sup> CARE Bangladesh, 2013, 'Terms of Reference: Review of Gender Analysis Process SHOUHARDO II'.

2. Women and children, specially girl child's health care (nutrition, treatment, reproductive)
3. Violence against women (at Family and Community level).
4. Women leadership (in family, at different committee at community level).

Actions to address these four areas have been implemented variously across all the 1509 villages, in most cases involving men as well as women. In the November 2012 Mid-Term Review, conducted by Tango, it was noted that, *'Although strong progress has been achieved on ending violence against women, additional focus and attention is necessary to address women's decision making power, mobility and to free them from detrimental patriarchal beliefs.'*

This report reviews SHOUHARDO II's experience with aiming to advance the empowerment of women and girls, and then seeks to provide recommendations to improve this practice. Based on the initial field work by the WayFair consultants, Michael Drinkwater and Laila Khondkar, the CARE SHOUHARDO II management team accepted a set of recommendations which can be taken-up during the remaining program period.

## 2.1 Purpose and Scope of the Review

The central aim of this report is: *To identify and recommend new/innovative strategies for addressing the community level gender barriers (across all strategic program objectives and for EKATA/ non-EKATA sites) for women's empowerment, especially in relation to women's decision making and freedom of movement.*

In the TOR some of the suggested areas of focus are with respect to improving women's decision making and mobility, and indeed by making further inroads in continuing to address the negative consequences of the patriarchal culture that continue to perpetuate poverty, food insecurity and child malnutrition.

## 3. Methodology

Given the size of the program, the WayFair consultants were only able to receive a snapshot of SHOUHARDO II's women's empowerment activities. Since WayFair has conducted a number of evaluations involving women's groups in recent years, in the original design their aim had been to focus on women's groups that were seen as 'positive deviants', that is, those groups that had shown especial progress with respect to advancing women's empowerment. During the inception meeting, it was agreed-upon to visit both leading and 'lagging' groups in each area, in order to be able to contrast the two, and so there was a shift in the orientation of the methodology.

In practice, the consultants found that there was not much difference between groups, bearing out what SHOUHARDO II's Rangpur Regional Coordinator described as an 'unification' approach, that is, there was much standardisation of methodologies. It also

shifted the consultant's focus to what appeared to have been more broadly achieved, and then the key challenges that had been faced and how they had been addressed.

There are four distinct types of areas that SHOUHARDO II is working in. The north-west region centred on Rangpur, the central Haor area around Mymensingh, the mid chars area, and the south-east in Teknaf Upazila, south of Cox's Bazar. During the inception meeting the consultants were asked to visit at least three of these. The areas and eventual villages visited by the consultants are listed below in Table 1:

**Table 1: Areas and Groups Visited**

Group	Village	Union	Upazila	District
EKATA	Sonaton-2	Kursha	Kaunia	Rangpur
VDC	Sonaton-2	Kursha	Kaunia	Rangpur
MCHN	Uttar Horishshor	Balapara	Kaunia	Rangpur
VDC	Uttar Horishshor	Balapara	Kaunia	Rangpur
EKATA/ VDC mixed	Bishnapur	Kursha	Kaunia	Rangpur
EKATA	Paikurhati	Paikurhati	Dhormopasha	Sunamgonj
VDC	Paikurhati	Paikurhati	Dhormopasha	Sunamgonj
EKATA	Halidakanda	Halidakanda	Dhormopasha	Sunamgonj
UP	-	Halidakanda	Dhormopasha	Sunamgonj
EKATA	Rangikhali	Hnila	Teknaf	Cox's Bazar
VDC	Rangikhali	Hnila	Teknaf	Cox's Bazar
VDC	Uttar Shilkhali	Baharchara	Teknaf	Cox's Bazar
UP	-	Baharchara	Teknaf	Cox's Bazar

*Note: Sunamgonj District as a whole is in the north-east Sylhet region, but Dhormopasha is separated from the rest of the district by hoar areas and is only accessible by road from Mymensingh and Netrokona*

There were thus three types of groups that the consultants visited: the EKATA (MCHN) women only groups, the mixed VDC groups, and then in Dhormopasha and Teknaf. The consultants also met with one UP in each area that allowed us to look at relations between the SHOUHARDO II supported groups and the UP.

Below is a summary of the full methodology employed by the consultants:

## 1. Inception

- i) Introductory meeting with SHOUHARDO II CBHQ staff
- ii) Finalization of work plan
- iii) Review SHOUHARDO II M&E framework, and all relevant documentation, including the Gender Analysis (GA) and Mid-Term Review.

## 2. Appreciative inquiry

The consultant's approach to the field methodology was to encourage participants to talk about what they valued about the project and the changes that had taken place in their lives. In order to help appreciate the changes that had taken place, they also talked about some of the challenges they had faced and how they had attempted to address these.

- iv) Meet with representatives of selected EKATA, VDC, UP and other relevant groups, as well as SHOUHARDO II SO staff and GA task force members, and relevant partner staff, in first area

Methods:

- Meet with those leading change in advancing gender equity and women's empowerment
    - community change agents/ natural leaders, women's and VDC platform groups, and UPs that have been successful
    - look at what has worked in areas of women's economic, social and political empowerment
    - areas of resistance (by men, but also women too e.g. elites, mothers in law)
    - areas where change is still needed
    - ideas on methods and processes for addressing these areas, including in how dialogue practices may help with the reconceptualising of power within social relations
  - Meet with SHOUHARDO II staff and partners at district and regional level
    - discuss with them their own ideas on what has worked, the opportunities for extending this, as well as the challenges encountered in deepening this work
    - talk about cultural issues in their own lives, to surface their own perceptions on change, and the challenges related to this
    - test and explore ideas identified in or from the community based discussions
- v) Repeat process in second (and if relevant, third) area, building on the findings and ideas surfaced and explored in the first area.

Meetings held:

- ❖ Used predominantly FGDs with:
  - EKATA Groups (4/7 unions)
  - VDCs (7/7 unions)
  - UPs (2/7 unions)
  - MCHN group (1 union)
- ❖ Also conducted a limited number of short interviews and case studies
- ❖ Documentational review to understand approaches and frameworks used, and reviews thus far
- ❖ Discussions with staff on addressing challenges



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## 4. CARE's Model of Women's Empowerment

In its strategy SHOUHARDO II draws upon CARE's Agency-Structure-Relations definition of women's empowerment, as illustrated below. One of the questions that were examined is how well this model is used in practice.

As explained in the second diagram below there is an interplay between all three dimensions of change. The agency level relates to the changes that occur in women's own capacities and aspirations, and this will include changes in her education, knowledge, and income. Then, the relational level refers to shifts in the power relations through which women must negotiate their way. In this respect it refers to power relations at multiple levels, but at the outset, the first relations that require negotiating are those within the household and family, with husbands and relatives. And finally, the structural level refers to the institutional environment that regulates women's choices.

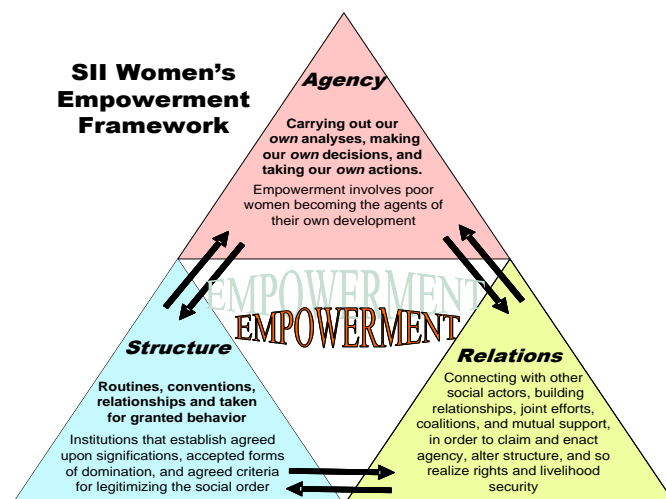
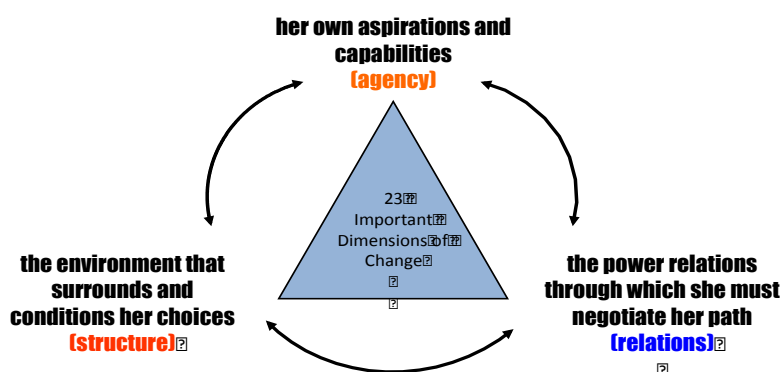


Fig 1: A-S-R Women's Empowerment Model

Necessarily, for the enduring empowerment of women to take place, there are two points to emphasis. First, change has to occur in all three dimensions. This is of critical importance. And second, the *process* of empowerment is as important as the outcomes, and hence the importance of the arrows in Figure 2. The term 'empower' itself, refers to the ways in which women come to be able to achieve things for themselves and their families individually and collectively. In the following section the report looks at some of SHOUHARDO II's experience so far with promoting the empowerment of women.

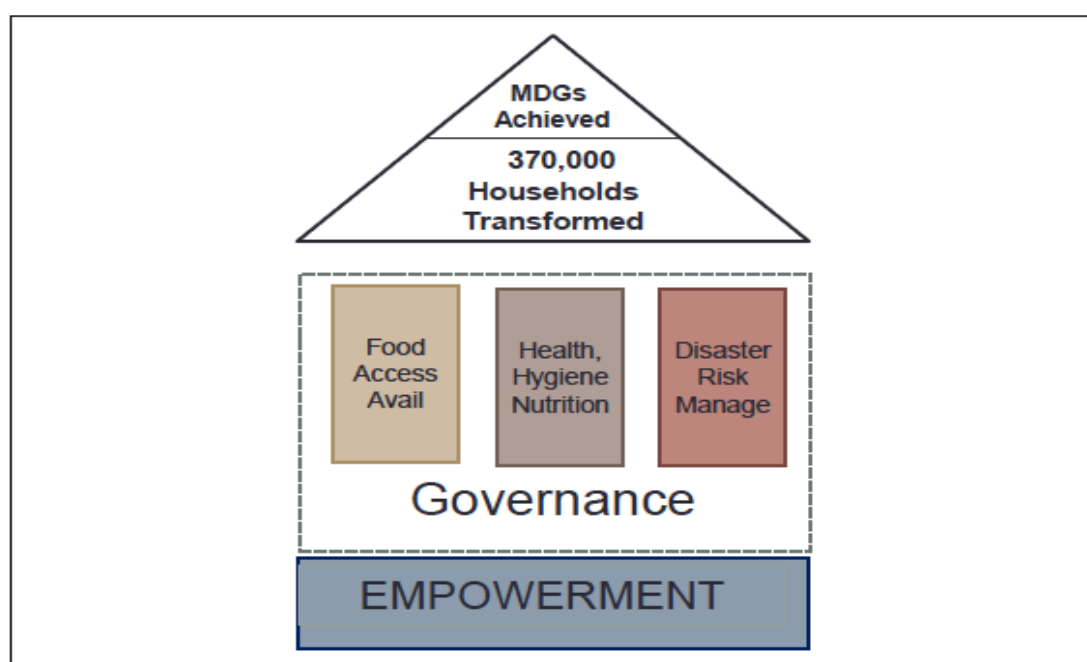
## Defining Women's Empowerment

We understand empowerment as the sum total of changes needed for a woman to realize her full human rights. The interplay of changes in:



## 5. Successes and Limitations of SHOUHARDO II's Women's Empowerment Work

The overall strategy for SHOUHARDO II as demonstrated in the conceptual 'house' model below is built upon an empowerment – and very specifically, women's empowerment – foundation. Key questions are how this foundation is conceived and being implemented in methodological terms, and what has been achieved so far? As noted in the Mid-Term Review, SHOUHARDO II's approach is based on the assumption that food insecurity and child malnutrition are strongly correlated with women's empowerment. Specifically, activities within SO3 have been designed to improve women's ability to influence decision-making and reduce violence against women. 'The design assumes that the high prevalence of violence against women, combined with women and adolescent girls' inability to make decisions regarding their own, their children's and their family's health, nutrition, education, finances and safety are underlying causes of poor health and nutrition status.'<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the elements of the women's empowerment strategy are taken across all the SOs, the fundamental approach towards women's and girls' empowerment is set through SO3, as explained below.

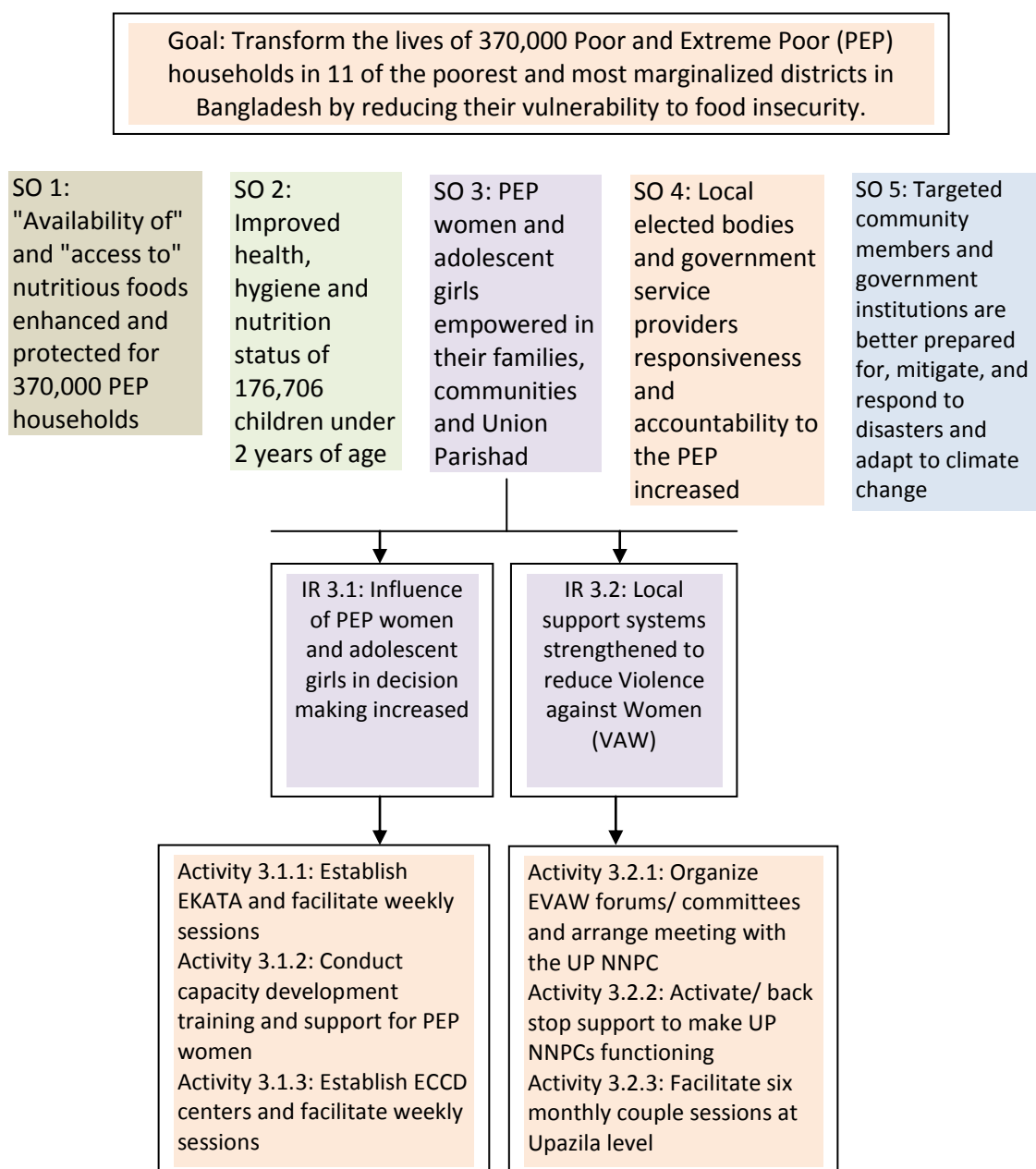


**Fig 3: The SHOUHARDO II Conceptual 'House'**

The overwhelming feature about SHOUHARDO II is the scale at which it works. In the current five year phase it is working across 1509 villages, and in order to do so SHOUHARDO's strategy is reliant predominantly upon community level CBOs, and associated group work processes. Altogether there are five Strategic Objectives (SOs) to the SHOUHARDO II strategy, with, apart from the foundational women's empowerment and governance SOs, additional SOs dealing with food security, the health and nutrition of women and children, and climate change and disaster response preparedness and adaptation.

<sup>4</sup> Tango, 2013, 'CARE Bangladesh: Mid-Term Review of SHOUHARDO II Multi-year Assistance Program'.





The women's empowerment SO3 strategy is depicted in its essence here. At the centre of the strategy is the formation of women only EKATA groups in 30% of the villages. In the remaining villages SHOUHARDO II works with different types of groups, in particular Mother and Child Health and Nutrition Groups (MCHN). The EKATA and MCHN groups are the two types of all women groups that SHOUHARDO II works with (the MCHN groups are seen as fitting under the health and nutrition SO2).

The second string of the SHOUHARDO II gender strategy is to focus on violence against women (VAW) activities. This focus cuts across the range of groups with which SHOUHARDO II works. It is one of the topics covered with the EKATA and MCHN groups, as well as with the mixed Village Development Committee (VDC) groups. The EAW forums operate at UP level, and are designed to form a point of engagement with the NNPC and UP. Of the 13 standing committees at UP level, the NNPC is the one designated to deal with gender based violence.

During the consultants village visits discussions were conducted mostly with VDC and EKATA groups. The VDC groups, in terms of their gender focus, mostly impressed the consultants. This was precisely because they were mixed groups, usually of 6 men and 5 women (or vice versa), and clearly had had extensive discussions on gender issues. Men especially in these groups exhibited some marked shifts in attitudes. For instance, in Uttar Horishshor VDC, Kaunia, Rangpur, in answer to the question, *'What is their vision for the relationship between men and women?',* one woman answered: 'Men and women should have their rights, and nobody should dominate other' (see Box 1). The men agreed with her statement - 'No-one should be dominating, there should be equality'. It was not just their words, the behavior of the men too exemplified this statement, and appeared to indicate they believed what they were saying.

**Box 1: Changes in gender relationship in their lives (answers given by each participant of the discussion), Uttar Horishshor VDC, Kaunia, Rangpur**

- W: Four members in the family. She was ill. Husband arranged for treatment, took care of household responsibilities, cooked, looked after the wife, the children also looked after mother. The relationship has improved. No conflict in the family.
- W: Earlier the husband did not allow her to go outside. Now she is participating in activities, became member of committees. Now husband does not resist.
- M: He was unemployed. Now can earn. Earlier there were conflicts with wife, which have decreased.
- W: Relationship with husband is better than before. Now husband does not create any barrier in her attending meetings.
- M: He was poor. Could not look after children. So there were conflicts with wife. Now he receives support from CARE (business). Wife also receives support from another NGO. Now there is no conflict.
- M: Financial crisis before. Now engaged in cow rearing. Cap sewing by wife. Relationship has been good even before.
- M: Earlier quarrels with wife due to poverty. That has decreased. Now he supports wife in cooking, and cleaning the house.
- M: Earlier only men participated in meetings. Now men and women participate. After experiencing that he understands the importance of shared decision making. Now husband and wife support each other.
- W: Earlier there were family problems. She took part in NGO activities. Some men told her husband that the wife will be too vocal. She made the husband understand that her work with the NGO will help the family.
- W: Earlier she was not so intelligent. Now her intelligence has improved. Earlier her husband created barriers in her attending NGO activities. Now he does not resist as she is earning.

In just one VDC group, the committee was overwhelmingly made up of women, with 10 of the 11 members. The sole man, however, was the chairman, and in our discussion he dominated it, with almost half the women remaining predominantly silent. In this group there was thus ironically less sense of women being empowered and gender equalities really being tackled than provided by the other groups. In fact, the whole attitude towards these women seemed patronizing. The consultants were told that in the original village meeting where the members were elected it had been said that because younger men were more mobile and often not in the village, as well as being in other committees already, it was better that women form the committee, with one man to support them. There was an

indication the members felt that an 'all women' group was good, and there was a level of pride in this, yet this group seemed the least dynamic of the VDCs the consultants met. Two women were SC members in the UP and talked more expressively, but there was much less sense that this was an empowering forum than the mixed groups the consultants met with, and the more lively engagement with men was absent.

As outlined in the methodology section, the EKATA groups were intended to be differentiated between 'leading' and 'lagging' groups, but in practice turned out to be very similar to each other, within a given geographical area. This is probably one of SHOUHARDO II's biggest overall successes, its cumulative effect at scale, especially when placed in historical context, as pointed out in the introduction.

## 5.1 Changes

As a result of the various program trainings and the information provided to them through it, as well as the support provided for particular income generating activities (through the VDCs), most of the women in the EKATA (and VDC) groups visited identified positive changes occurring in their lives. Some of these main changes were as follows.

- Improvements in their lives stemming from either their increased incomes or food security, achieved through their access to resources provided through the range of activities groups are implementing with SHOUHARDO II support.
- Their improved ability to earn income increases the respect they receive from husbands and families, leading to an improved role in decision-making and reduced violence
- Attending groups results in health and education benefits too for children – and this also leads to increased acceptance of their attending group meetings by husbands and mothers-in-law
- Improved nutrition status for children, due to improved knowledge and food availability
- Information about the legislation against early marriage is delaying marriages – and seen as improving women and children's health, since they are not giving birth as teenagers.
- Girls are returning to education (though this is often *madrasas*, since they haven't passed the Grade 5 exams that would enable them to return to state schools, and because in some areas they are the nearest available school).
- Volunteers and field facilitator are benefiting in particular from capacity building and demonstrate the greatest levels of personal empowerment, i.e. they are often showing the more profound levels of personal change. This was exemplified in accounts provided of their increased ability to negotiate with husbands/ families, and others, to delay their marriages and complete their education, and to use information to pursue their own priorities.



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The outcomes of the groups were not the same across all three locations. Whilst the groups in Rangpur and Dhormopasha (Mymensingh) provided similar accounts, there was a distinct difference in Teknaf in the much more conservative south-east. A contrast is provided in the two tables below between the changes experienced by one of the EKATA groups met with in Rangpur, and another in Teknaf, actually in the less conservative of the two villages visited there.

In the Rangpur group, the adolescent girls talk about being able to return to school, having parents value their opinions more, and being treated equally to their brothers. The responses of their peers in the Teknaf group were less confident. Whilst also being pleased to be able to return to local *madrassa* education, with regard to their relationships, progress was having parents 'consider' their views. For them it was a start simply to be granted some recognition.

For the adult women in their groups, the Teknaf women talked predominantly about two things – adolescent girls being able to return to school, their ability to produce more food and in some cases earn income (or their sons), and their new ability to sign their names. They also talked about their views being considered more in their households, even if that did not necessarily translate into greater equality in decision making. For the women in Bishnapur, Rangpur, there were a few who also talked about their improved literacy and ability to sign their names, but they also referred to a wider range of rights issues – and about women and men having equal rights. Practices like early marriage and dowry were mentioned, as well as VAW, which was not directly referred to by the Teknaf women, and they also talked more explicitly about shared decision making.

**Table 2: EKATA and VDC Group Members, Bishnapur, Kaunia, Rangpur**

	<b>Their Proudest Achievements</b>	<b>Changes in Gender Relationships</b>
<b>Adolescents</b>	Children's education	Earlier parents created obstacles in going to EKATA. Now that has changed. They feel good
	Adolescent girls are able to move freely	Now parents understand that boys and girls have equal rights.
	Can go to school, can speak with others (earlier drop-out)	Earlier, brothers were preferred by the parents. Now parents understand the importance of giving equal food to daughters and sons
	Parents value our opinions, can move freely	Brother was treated better by the parents. Now they give importance to her education.
	Parents value my opinion even when I am a girl, decreased eve teasing	Now I can talk to parents. Relationship improved
	Early marriage has decreased	
<b>Women</b>	I could not sign my name, now I can do that.	In-laws like her now, as the husband earns and gives to her (who gives to mother-in-law)
	Earlier women were not valued, lots of torture. Now husbands and mothers-in-law understand that wives are human beings, treat them well.	Now takes decision collectively with son and daughter-in-law (better result when shared decision making)
	Dowry has decreased to some extent.	Shared decision making now
	Women and men have equal rights-I understand that after coming to EKATA.	Husband was not good (behavior), now good
	Learnt to sign, can speak with UP body, I	Poverty in family. Now shared decision making

	am brave now	
	I offer services (refer to hospitals-she is a member of PIC)	Husband spent recklessly. That has changed
	Receive nutrition	Treated better by mother-in-law
	Daughter's marriage without dowry	Now husband and wife works, shared decision making
	Now I can speak with various people	Lots of quarrels before, now I make him understand, we work together
	Early marriage has stopped, ECCD	Very poor. One meal/day, now two meals. Now my opinion is taken seriously by family members
	VAW has stopped	Learnt about things, work together with wife, no problem
	Participate in sessions	No problems before
	Receives food to improve nutrition	Husband has business, income, good relationship with him and in-laws

**Table 3: EKATA Group Members, Rangikhali village, Hnila, Teknaf**

	<b>Their Proudest Achievements</b>	<b>Changes in Gender Relationships</b>
<b>Adolescents</b>	She receives more support regarding education (adolescent)-parents value her education more	Parents consider her views
	She goes to madrasa, that was not encouraged before (dropped out for sometime)	Now parents allow her to go outside
	Now becoming educated, increased life skills (adolescent)	Her views are considered
	Re-enrolled in madrasa (she completed grade 5 in madrasa before)	Improved relationship with mother and sister (father passed away)
<b>Women</b>	She can send grand-daughter to school, will not arrange early marriage for her, can earn through vegetable selling, learnt how to sign name	Equal distribution of food in HH; improved relationship with husband (reduced conflicts)
	Children are going to school, vegetables production	Less quarrels with husband now, she can go to meetings (VDC)
	Now son has own rickshaw (she supported him by selling goats)	Earlier she had to follow instructions from mother-in-law; now she has independence, can decide on her own
	Rice cultivation, livestock (goats); send children to school. Can sign her own name	Relationship with husband was good before also
	Husband (Imam) did not allow her to come to meeting. That has changed. She is engaged in sewing	No quarrels
	Sewing, rice cultivation	No significant change (she stays in parents' place with three sons)
	Children are going to school, (they can guide them, can go to the school to ask how they are doing), sewing	Now her views are considered by husband
	Now she can send children to school, income	Parents value education of children
	Now she can earn by working in salt factory (earlier she was not able to go out)	Husband and wife listens to each other while making decisions
	Children are going to school, poultry, learnt to sign name	Good understanding with husband



	Learnt to sign name, children are going to school (she looks after their cleanliness)	Less quarrels
	Sends children to school, sign name, income	
	Husbands quarreled a lot before, no conflict now, children are going to school (she takes them to school), learnt to sign name	

### ***How much change is actually taking place?***

A key question from the discussions with these groups, and some of the subsequent individual discussions that took place is, how much change is actually happening? It is important to note that the comments in this section do not refer to the scale of change across the whole project, which is reported on in the Mid-Term Review. Rather the focus in this section is on the depth and profoundness of the change that the consultants witnessed, with respect to the A-S-R framework. This type of analysis is important to understand the bigger picture, but does not necessarily consider the limitations of SHOUHARDO II and to which extent it can influence structural change, especially given its project focus and mandate.

**Early marriage:** Culturally women have traditionally been married whilst still adolescents, but the important fact here is that legislation now prevents girls from marrying under the age of 18 and boys under 21 – and this information has been widely disseminated. The main enforcement mechanism of the act is that girls are now required to produce birth certificates when they wish to be married, and since many girls in rural areas do not have these, UP officials have to issue them. Accordingly, UP chairmen told us they were using the test of whether a girl ‘looks’ 18 or not. What that means in practice on a widespread basis is difficult to say, but many agencies, including the government itself, are promoting adherence to this new practice. In the first



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EKATA group, most of their adult members had been married at younger ages, but none of the adolescents had yet been, even though there had been pressure on some. Marriages are arranged, and since bridegrooms’ families are doing the selecting, they are usually looking for a woman 5-12 years younger than the prospective groom, and who will be subservient and obedient. For the woman’s family, dowry is less expensive if their daughter is of a younger age. However, the group are now supporting the adolescents on this, making the role of older women in the group extremely important, as are the VDCs, and if necessary the UP chairman and councillors too. Other agencies are addressing this issue in the same way too. In Dhormopasha the young and efficient Paikurhati UP chairman talked at length about

the birth certificate issue, and how the UP will wish to see the girl before a birth certificate is issued. So, although the EKATA groups and VDCs are making a difference here, it is not a change that is unique to them, and there is nothing especially distinct in the way they are pursuing the issue.

**Dowry:** The Dowry Prohibition Act extends back to 1980, although until relatively recently it had been paid little attention, since the provision of dowry is a ubiquitous practice across Bangladesh. It should be noted that although dowry was initially more of a Hindu than a Muslim practice, it is practiced regardless across the two religious groups – a good example of a practice that has been culturally imposed, irrespective of its traditional roots.

The negative effects of dowry in perpetuating women's subservience not only to their husbands, but their husbands' families, are beginning to be more widely discussed. A major consequence of dowry is that once provided it can serve as the ongoing basis of demands by the husband's family of the women's, i.e. she and they are expected to continue to give periodically throughout the marriage, the legacy of men being seen as the providers. It also leads to girls being seen as a 'burden' within their own families, a reason parents may seek to marry them early, when dowry demands are also lower. Tackling this highly negative arrangement for life, is thus one of the major gender issues in Bangladesh. In 2006, when CARE Bangladesh participated in the CARE wide Women's Empowerment Strategic Impact Inquiry (WE SII), participants in the final synthesis meeting confirmed that this was the one single issue upon which they had failed to make progress, and that to do so would require national level advocacy.<sup>5</sup> And indeed, since then the issue has been one that women's organisations in Bangladesh have sought to highlight.

Within the EKATA and VDC groups for the most part the consultants found that the legislation was not well understood. The law states that any cash or gift above the equivalent of USD 6.6 (BDT500) is illegal. When we asked about dowry, however, women commonly reported that whilst cash for dowry was now not provided nearly so often, gifts still were. As one woman in a Dhormopasha group stated, her daughter was married without cash dowry, but they gave gifts. So for her son, who is not yet married, she said they will not accept cash, but if the girl's parents gave gifts, that is their choice and she cannot refuse. By taking out the cash portion, the value of the dowry might be decreasing a bit – although others also talked about the money now being used in the wedding itself. But reducing the cash provided does not in itself change the practice of dowry and the subservient relationship that is created, and nor is it in accord with the law.



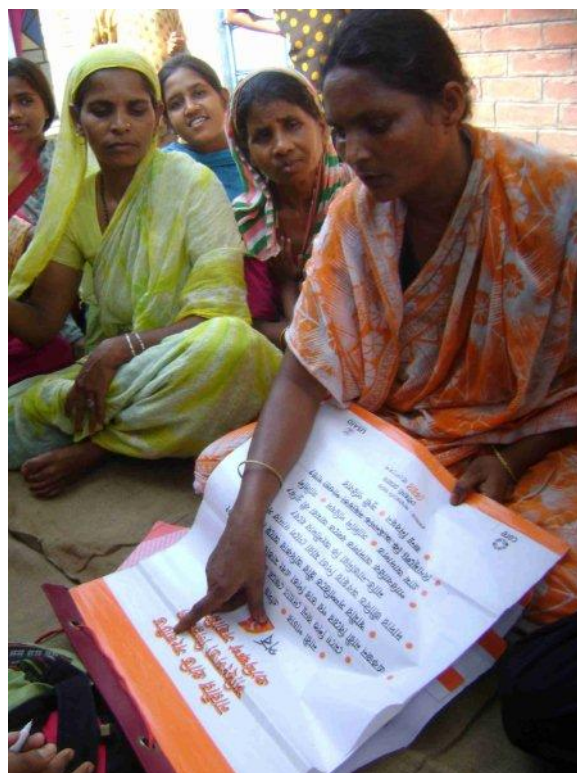
<sup>5</sup> Ana Coghlan, 2007, 'Summary Report of the Strategic Impact Inquiry Synthesis Workshop', CARE Bangladesh.



Ironically, the only person who described the actual law actually was a volunteer with the EKATA group in the more conservative Teknaf area, where the women did not talk about changes in dowry practices as being one of their achievements. In the case of the volunteer, who was now undertaking a basic degree at her *madrassa*, her brother had been married recently and, as a result of her influence, her family had accepted neither cash nor gifts dowry from his wife's family, above the USD 6.6 (BDT500) limit. Accordingly, when she married they would not provide dowry either, in this case as a reciprocal arrangement. This was another point made by families, if you only have daughters, then your ability to refuse to pay dowry is extremely limited. In this instance, as one woman commented your main ability to use the law is only to stop the husband's family asking for more than the daughter's family can offer.

**Violence against Women:** As outlined earlier, addressing VAW is one of the two central struts of SHOUHARDO II's SO3 strategy. This is in recognition of both how widespread the phenomenon is, and the debilitating effect it has on the lives of women especially, but also the whole family. Consequently, in the groups the consultants met with there was considerable talk about trying to improve gender relationships within their HHs. For the most part women said that on the basis of the improved knowledge, incomes and food they were bringing into the household, they were gaining greater respect from their husbands and in-laws, and that this was making their situations easier. Benefits they identified were that their voice was more respected and listened to, they were less likely to be beaten by their husbands, and, in the north, they were more aware of support services that are available in case of violence. The critical point was that women gained more respect because they could contribute more.

There were also attempts by all the groups visited – EKATA, MCHN and VDC – to address domestic violence. The facilitator working with the MCHN group in Uttar Horishshor, Rangpur (see box below), provided us with a fascinatingly detailed account of one mediation intervention that she had led. The scenario involved a meticulous counselling service, involving several actors, and altogether more sophisticated than it is usually possible to elicit through formal institutions.



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**Box 2: A Case on Counselling against Violence****Role of the MCHN Facilitator, Uttar Horishshor in resolving conflicts**

The facilitator listens to the husband. First, if he does not want to talk, rapport building is done for the first few days. After that, she raises the issue of violence against his wife. The facilitator explains that the wife has left her own parents. She needs care in her husband's place. She emphasizes on the importance of family peace and explains that conflict will affect children negatively. She also mentions the laws against VAW. She talks with the wife separately. She asks the wife not to confront her husband in a violent way. She tells the husband about the role of women in IGAs. There will be more earning, less conflicts. If necessary, VDC members, UP member, elites, and neighbours are also informed by the facilitator and asked to convince the husband.

One aspect of this case that is instructive though is the reasons provided by the facilitator/counsellor to the husband as to why he should refrain from beating his wife. Most obviously he is not simply told that it is wrong, an abuse of his masculine power, and something that is neither condoned by his religion nor culture. In fact, the implication is that VAW is culturally condoned.

There is a point here that will be returned to, that in addressing VAW SHOUHARDO II could build off to a greater extent previous analyses about the underlying causes of VAW that CARE has conducted and utilised in projects. These analyses point out how such violence is rooted in the cultural inequality to which women are subjected to, caused by practices such as girls' education not seen as being as important as boys, early marriage, dowry, and the fact that men are seen as being the predominant breadwinners in the household.<sup>6</sup> When these analyses were used in the early 2000s by one of CARE Bangladesh's first VAW interventions, religious and other community leaders were also involved, who agreed that since neither Islam nor Hinduism sanctions VAW, that the cultural causes of this should be addressed. As a consequence, many of these influential leaders started to speak out about domestic violence, and also about the practices of taking girls out of school, early marriage, and dowry, that lead to it. Women were seen as being entitled to lead a life free of violence as their right as equally human beings. There is still more room for SHOUHARDO II to address this issue in more depth. Women in one group talked about telling men about the costs of violence, if they injured their wives. This is something picked up from CARE's last VAW initiative, COVAW, a project that was trying to pilot a tool for measuring the cost of violence, something that was required for the compensation provisions of the 2010 Domestic Violence Act to be implemented. But warning men of the potential costs of injuring their wives should be a subsidiary rather than primary message they are receiving.

In defence of SHOUHARDO II, the Mid-Term Review mentions that women across the project areas seeking medical or legal services to cope with violence. There has also been an increase in women participating in *salish* (local arbitration) from the baselines 27% to 43% overall.<sup>7</sup> There has been widespread awareness raising of the issue, and some shift in

<sup>6</sup> Nazneen Kanji, 2006, 'Strategic Impact Inquiry for CARE Bangladesh: Partnership For Healthy Life (PHL): Violence Against Women (VAW) Initiative', CARE Bangladesh, and Nasreen Huq and Shaheda Hassan, 2005, 'Violence Against Women: Report of the Needs Assessment Against Violence Prevention', CARE Bangladesh.

<sup>7</sup> Tango, 2013, 'CARE Bangladesh: Mid-Term Review of SHOUHARDO II Multi-year Assistance Program'.

practices. The question now is to get at the cultural roots of gender based violence to ensure the change is sustainable for the longer term.

**Engaging Men (Positive masculinities):** Men are involved in the women's empowerment related work in SHOUHARDO II most obviously in the case of the VDCs, where they are split often 6-5 with women in terms of membership. All the male facilitators in Rangpur and Dhormopasha talked about positive changes in their relationships with their wives, and indeed the women in the VDC, and indeed these changes were visible just in the way the meetings were conducted, since women spoke as much and as easily as men, and their views were listened to and respected. Ironically, as mentioned earlier, the least impressive VDC in the north was Uttar Horishshor, which had 10 women and only 1 male VDC member, the chairman, and clearly the dominating personality. In his case it seemed the lack of another male reinforced rather than shifted his masculine personality, and this was the least integrated of the northern groups.



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In Teknaf, in the south, it was a different story; at least men and women were attending the meeting together! In Rangikhali, the less conservative site, the male VDC members present (only 3 of 6) provided the following comments when asked what changes had occurred in their household gender relationships.

### Box 3: Rangikhali, Teknaf – Male VDC members, Changes in Gender Relationships

- Male (adults) members previously did not consider if females, parents will have food to eat; earlier there were more conflicts (mentioned by male)
- Poverty reduction; improved relationship with wife; she participates in court yard meetings, he is a VDC member (male)
- Harmonious relationship in family (solve mistakes through discussions; he allows wife to go to her parents)

In the second village in Teknaf, Uttar Shilkhali in the extreme south, the consultants observed that the whole VDC meeting was regulated by a male facilitator who stood on the margins, often directing where people sat and their turn to speak (including men, though especially women). The women were nearly all wearing *burkhas*, and a few had their faces covered, so it was also much more difficult to get a sense of body dynamics and facial expressions. Yet, as the statements below depict, there have been changes, most especially in terms of women at least having some sort of voice now, and a modicum of respect, with some concurrent improvement of gender relationships within the household. But a long way to go in terms of the empowerment of women.

**Box 4: Uttar Shilkhali, Teknaf – VDC members, Changes in Gender Relationships**

**Changes in Gender Relationships**

- Earlier women were not consulted in decision making
- All family members discuss regarding decision making
- Harmonious relationship
- Earning income; respected in family
- Husband listens to her
- Husband's behavior improved
- Respected in family due to income
- She works in clinic, earns, has respect in family
- Earns as volunteer, respected by husband
- Works in BRAC school, improved relationship
- Earlier unemployed, now has income; family members respect him (man)
- Income-harmonious relationship in family (man)
- There is peace in family (man)
- Good relationship in family (man)
- Improved relationship (man)

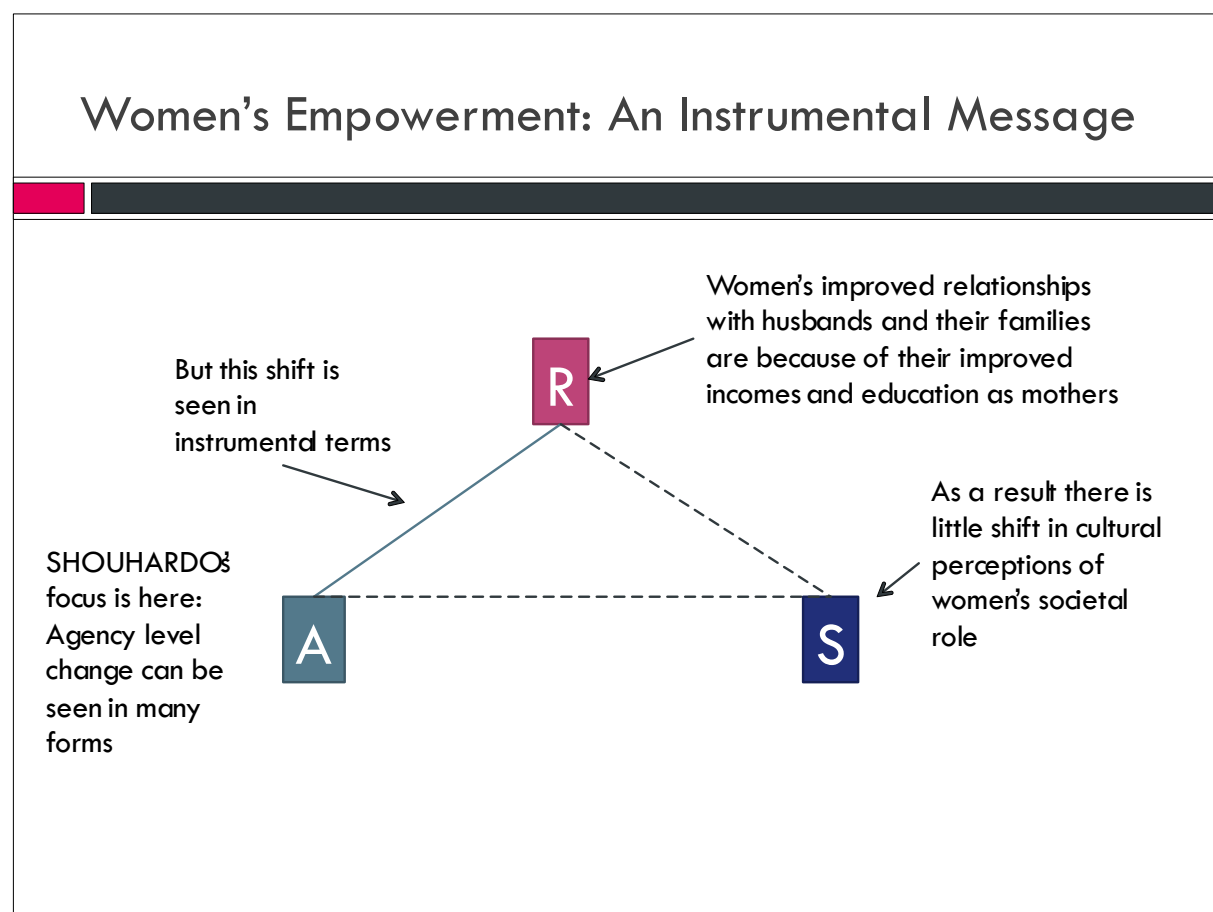
There are some other activities to involve men that SHOUHARDO II carries out, such as couples counselling, and an example of such was recounted earlier (Box 2). There are also some more formal couple counselling sessions, but the real difference that is being made in terms of work on gender relationships and in terms of alternative role models and attitudes towards gendered power relations is being effected through the VDCs. The VDCs support the EKATA groups too, so although changes in HH gender relationships are taking place, as EKATA group members bring their new knowledge, incomes and group solidarity into their homes, it is nevertheless the confirmatory attitudes of the male VDC members that are validating these changes.

***The Limitations***

It has already been identified that both the strength and weakness of SHOUHARDO II is the consistency of its methodology. Strength because most sites – even in Teknaf – have achieved some change, As depicted in the diagram below, with respect to CARE's women's empowerment framework, SHOUHARDO II has most clearly focused on agency level change. This is evidenced through the accounts of the women in the EKATA, MCHN and VDC groups. This is fine as a starting point, and their lives have benefited, since SHOUHARDO II is providing capacity building, training, and assets, and these have all been taken on, valued and utilized. And there have been changes in their household gender relationships too. The issue however is the instrumental reasoning that was consistently provided to explain these changes.

For example, women explained improvements in their relationships with their husband and in-laws because of the benefits they could now bring, whether improved knowledge, additional food or income, into the household. Similarly, even the messaging around

domestic violence is largely constructed around costs and the negative consequences, plus the fact that the wife is a 'newcomer' in the man's home (which unconsciously reinforces the subservience messaging within the practice of dowry). This is a means focused approach towards women's empowerment, as is centrally depicted in the 'house' conceptual model – women's empowerment is seen as the foundational building block to transforming the lives of some 370,000 households, by reducing their vulnerability to food insecurity.



**Fig 4: SHOUHARDO II's Agency Level Focus**

The drawback of this approach is that by instrumentalising the nature of women's empowerment, it is difficult to achieve structural change. Equally compelling, is the fact that instrumentally-justified social change risks reversion if the promised relationship (women's greater freedom = greater family/male welfare) ever breaks down in practice. To change the nature of societal institutions fundamentally different messaging needs to be adopted.

The second limitation identified, the lack of reflective practice within SHOUHARDO II. This occurs at two critical levels; within the methodologies used with groups, and then within the practices of staff and partners. In the section below, the EKATA group methodology is considered in more detail, since this highlights the issue, and then the document will return to the question of reflective practice within SHOUHARDO II's internal practices subsequently.



## 6. EKATA Group Methodology

Since EKATA groups exist in 30% of the 1509 villages in which SHOUHARDO II operates, there are some 453 groups in total. The origins of the EKATA approach used by SHOUHARDO II lie in the REFLECT methodology that was developed by Action Aid, but beyond that in Paulo Freire's seminal work on adult literacy. This work, which dates back to the 1970s, stressed the role of literacy in the 'conscientisation' of participants. In other words, Freire saw literacy as a vehicle for making those without rights, active agents of their own change. His was in many respects the first real empowerment methodology.

This means that to be effective, the REFLECT methodological process must be very strongly analytical. In a case where WayFair examined the use of this methodology by CARE Nepal, this was indeed very powerfully the case. In the Nepal methodology, the first exercise undertaken in a community is a resource and power map – a social map that leads to an analysis of power relations in the community and an understanding of who wins and loses in terms of access to environmental, infrastructural and institutional resources.<sup>8</sup> What was different compared with the SHOUHARDO II process is that for every community the results varied. This mapping exercise was then followed up by a further set of analytical exercises, all built upon the original exercise and successively intended to deepen participants understanding of their situation, and how inequitable or exploitative relationships they were subject to might be addressed. In this instance, the REFLECT process was undoubtedly empowering, with participants undertaking deep learning, and then through effective organizational capacity building, developing the ability and solidarity to select their own priorities for action, and to pursue them as a group. In all the FGDs there, the women were highly animated, articulate, confident, and proud of their achievements. There were a range of issues selected and acted upon, and the trajectory and debates occurring in each village were distinct.

The SHOUHARDO II program is focusing on a pre determined set of four issues. The recommendations section will outline possible steps towards making shifts towards more reflective and analytical practices.

The process that SHOUHARDO II is using with the EKATA groups follows three stages and has been described in the following way:

As per EKATA guidelines, the first 2 months are for finalization of EKATA members, arranging sitting place and logistics etc. Then the next 24 months start with analysis of EKATA members' development issues, barriers and dream/goal. Subsequently they analyze problems, prioritize problems and plan and implement actions, monitor progress and analyze learning, and plan next course of actions. Then 10 months is allocated for practicing greater leadership by the EKATA members and less support by the EKATA Volunteers. However, more than 2 months may be required for group formation and arranging meeting rooms and logistics, but the second stage of 24 months is allowed for actions and this starts with EKATA members' development issues, barriers and dream/goal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Drinkwater and Diana Wu, 2011, 'Emergent Struggles: Local Activism and the 'Equal and Fair Wage' Campaigns in the Janakpur Area, Nepal', WayFair Associates/ IKM.

<sup>9</sup> Feedback on the SHOUHARDO II Gender Strategy Review and Recommendation Report (Draft)

In contrast to Bangladesh, Nepal is using a more process orientated, rather than outcome orientated approach. In a traditional, log frame sense, it could be said that the Nepal process was a 'bad' one, because it was producing a wide range of results, mostly ***unrelated to the original project log frame***. However, with respect to women's empowerment, the excitement of the Nepal process and the range of striking results that the consultants were able to tease out, demonstrated the efficacy of the model. Once again, this is not to say that the existing EKATA methodology is not achieving anything; rather that the promise could be considerably greater.

#### Box 6: The EKATA Process

##### EKATA at a glance:

- a) EKATA facilitator's selection and training – this is a community volunteer
- b) EKATA group formation with the collective decision by women, adolescent girls and VDC
- c) Introduction among all group members and assessment of their perception about development
- d) Identify what they want to achieve by next two and half years, and what will be their role to achieve those
- e) Identifying local potentials, opportunities, risks and problems.
- f) Ranking their problems and prioritize them to resolve
- g) Detailing the problems by using PRA tools, folk song, Life story telling, folk tale, role-play etc.
- h) Analysis of problems to identify the root causes and finding the solution of those problems. COVAW for example, has used a range of tools designed to uncover the nature of gender relations. Tools have included 24-hour time series analysis between men and women, Gender construction analysis, agree/disagree analysis, violence tree analysis and gender differential & equality analysis.<sup>1</sup>
- i) Preparing an action plan and its implementation - assess the progress and take next course of action through "Reflective Practice". In the SHOUHARDO II I project, EKATA groups have also collaborated with VDC groups for common plans for action.
- j) Selecting of key word/s to learn literacy
- k) Learning to read, write and calculate by de-coding the key words



## 7. Recommendations

Below are the recommendations endorsed by the SHOUHARDO II management team that can be implemented during the remaining life span of SHOUHARDO II.

### 1. Deepening Understanding of Women's Inequality and Consequences

SHOUHARDO II to promote additional forms of analysis that help communities to understand the consequences of retaining harmful cultural practices which affects both the families and communities. This can be aided again by drawing upon some of the earlier analyses that CARE Bangladesh has undertaken, particularly in the VAW field. SHOUHARDO II will reinforce messages with more convincing arguments and analytical tools that will help in making the messages more specific and facilitate stronger realization of the communities on the consequences of early marriage, dowry and domestic violence.

This will be helpful during the exit phase of the program and allow EKATA's to focus on new challenges of the post-SHOUHARDO II program implementation. With respect to changing analytical practices in EKATA groups, the challenge for SHOUHARDO II is to encourage groups to undertake more original, reflective thinking. In the short term, the best way to trial this is to pilot a training exercise with a batch of community facilitators, and to expose them to a more genuine REFLECT methodology. This training should be based around the topics below, but the aim of the training should be simple: encourage the facilitators to go back to their groups and, i) discuss these topics in a more open ended way, motivating participants to explore more deeply why the current situation exists, in order ii) to generate ideas on group actions they might pursue, in support of specific aims.



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Some of the areas where sharper analyses, and subsequently messages need to become more convincing are as follows:

Complacency around dowry-The lack of clear definition as to what constitutes dowry (i.e. that gifts count as much as cash does), and the failure to address it as a major contributory factor to women being seen as unequal vis-à-vis her husband and his family throughout her married life remain ongoing problems. There is therefore more need to unpack these injustices that dowry creates with respect to the status of women when they marry, and to have the issues more thoroughly discussed in EKATA and VDC meetings. People need to be encouraged to analyze the implications of the practice more and then to debate how they can address the issue more effectively. Seeking to curtail the provision of dowry is clearly a critical aspect, but so is addressing the misnomer that a woman should be seen as unequal

to her husband because she cannot contribute as much to the household's health and well being. This is clearly wrong, but also lies at root of the inequalities inherent in dowry.

Violence by men against women is not justified in any respect – but the commodification of women leads to it. Some of the counselling described to us led by women facilitators and volunteers in working with men who beat their wives, whilst relatively sophisticated in method, still starts from the principle that the husband has to be persuaded why he should treat his wife better, including acknowledging that she is a stranger in his family and so on. This is wrong. The husband is wrong believing he has any entitlement to beat his wife, it is a complete misuse of his power and it is an illegal act. Again, groups need to discuss this issue and the factors underlying it in more detail, to be able to agree as to how they should approach the issue with much stronger messaging, and when necessary how they deal with actual cases.

Greater encouragement and further investment in girls completing their education is vital. As in the words of Begum Rokeya again, it is education that makes us all 'fit for freedom'. There is an issue here though in that many girls are returning to *madrasas* rather than state schools in all the areas visited by the consultants, having not passed their Grade 5 exams. This leads one to wonder as to how much the messages the adolescent girls are receiving in the EKATA groups are being supported or contradicted in the *madrasas*. This means that some contact and work with the *madrasas* is necessary around messaging on gender related issues.

The benefits of delaying marriage as long as possible are explained mainly in health terms, especially related to the dangers of adolescent girls to conceive and bear children. Again there is a need for this issue to be discussed in a more rounded fashion in the EKATA groups. As equals, girls should have as much chance to go to school as their brothers; so what are the factors that lead to this inequality? This should help reinforce added messages related to the benefits to the girls themselves – to be better educated and to have opportunities for earning more income and leading to more fulfilling lives, with better relations with their husbands/ in-laws families, as well as healthier children. A further issue related to adolescent girls is the practice of eve-teasing, an early social example of boys asserting perceived male power over women. Interestingly one EKATA group in Rangpur mentioned that eve teasing is mostly carried out by boys from wealthier families, who obviously believe that their class as well as gender provides them the right to engage in humiliating girls in this way. This suggests this is subject that needs addressing with schools and adolescent boys too, as part of messaging designed to get them also to discuss issues around gender equality more openly.

## *2. EKATA Groups: Piloting additional training for Community Facilitators and Volunteers*

A consistent recommendation for SHOUHARDO II, included in the Mid-Term Review has been to develop further the capacities of the SHOUHARDO II facilitators and volunteers. For SO3, reference has already been made to the need to strengthen the ability of community volunteers and the facilitators from the local partners who support them, to conduct a more open-ended, enquiry based REFLECT analysis.

A starting point also for this additional training must be the message about women being equally human and that violence against women is a violation of human rights. It is important to reinforce that violation of such human rights and discriminatory practices have negative consequences for the women, their family and the communities. SHOUHARDO II's work is about addressing the cultural subversion of these rights that leads to their exploitation.

Within CARE Bangladesh, the most promising methodology that has been evolved for developing the skills of local facilitators is the natural leaders approach, particularly as employed within the rural extreme poor program.

In SHOUHARDO II currently, with the 30 hours of time a week required from the 'volunteers' and the range of sessions and activities they are expected to carry out, the reporting requirement from them is to tick activity boxes, rather than to demonstrate how real processes of empowerment are taking place. The following are recommendations for an experimental pilot.

Given the remaining time-frame the most feasible approach would be to select a group of community facilitators and volunteers in one or more of SHOUHARDO II's regions, and train them in a more activist methodology.

The aim of this one or more pilots (depending on how many regions are involved), will be to encourage EKATA, MCHN, VDC and other groups to undertake deeper analyses into the issues they have already been exploring, and on this basis to self-initiate new activities (see recommendation #1 above). Evidence of their success will thus lie in their ability to undertake this self-initiation, whether it is to address early marriage, dowry, VAW, women's access to assets and to marketing opportunities, or other issues they deem relevant for the post SHOUHARDO II phase.

What is key is that with only a limited period left for these groups to receive SHOUHARDO II support, they ***must start seeing their groups as existing for themselves, not the project.*** This is hard for them at the present, when their agendas are so much run by the project. Thus the intent behind encouraging the groups to self-initiate activities, is to start to take greater responsibility for themselves – and this means starting to map out their own agenda, rather than one that is essentially handed to them by the project.

In the Mid-Term Review reference is made to one FGD with an EVAW Forum in Mymensingh, in which they state, 'In 2015, SHOUHARDO II will be gone, but we will stay. We will stop child marriage. We will make the future generations understand that they become enlightened by education.'<sup>10</sup> If more of this attitude – with appropriate agendas attached, can be fostered now, it will leave SHOUHARDO II much better set for the likely continuity of some of these empowerment initiatives.

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<sup>10</sup> TANGO, 2013, 'CARE Bangladesh – SHOUHARDO II MYAP Mid-Term Review (MTR)'.

### 3. Linking the EKATA Groups to other Organizations and Networks

The most challenging task for SHOUHARDO II is to evolve a longer term vision and linkages for the EKATA groups within the remaining 18 months of the project life span. With 513 EKATA groups having been formed, they need to be linked into appropriate types of networks before the end of the current funding period of SHOUHARDO II. In the 'process' plan, the groups will spend the last 10 months planning for life without SHOUHARDO II. It will not be a list of activities that will lead to the continuing relevance of the groups, but rather two other factors:

1. the self belief, capabilities and sense of solidarity generated amongst the members, and
2. the extent to which the groups come to be linked with some form of supporting network, movement or federation.

The first requirement is for SHOUHARDO II to understand what other kinds of women's formations and networks exist in the areas in which it is working, in order to see whether any other types of links are feasible. These need to be looked at in two ways.

- a) Internally to CARE. In some areas in which SHOUHARDO II is operating CARE has other ongoing projects too. Some of these, like FSUP in the Mymensingh area, and SETU in the Rangpur area, have also supported the formation of EKATA groups. The question is to whether any of these projects have *district level structures, especially one representing women*. SETU has natural leader forums, which are mixed groups.
- b) Externally, as to whether any other forms of networks exist at UP, upazila or district level. Bangladesh does have many different types of women's organizations and movements; a weakness is that they are often not well networked, especially at more local levels. This is in contrast with Nepal, for instance, which has strong vertical network structures that link horizontally organized groups at local levels to national movements. There are organizations that CARE has worked with that have network structures – Mahila Parishad, Naripokkho, both of whom operate in around 51 districts, BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust). In the feedback comments to us, it was stated that there have been attempts to link some EKATA leaders with organizations like Naripokkho, Mahila Parishod, BLAST, BRAC's legal aid services, and the Women Lawyer's Association. SHOUHARDO II has also facilitated a 'People's Convention' of women leaders, including, EKATA representatives, in collaboration with Action Aid, Concern, BRAC, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and ASRAI. Based on this collaboration, SHOUHARDO II has also sought to link EKATA groups with BRAC's women groups (called *Palli Samaj*), RDRS's women federations, and the Durbar groups of Naripokkho.

SHOUHARDO II does need to map what networks and organizations do exist and see if there are opportunities to link vertically to some district level networks. With RDRS, for example, in the Rangpur region, federations are UP based, but the higher linkages still weak, so these might be organizations the EKATA groups can collaborate with in some areas. In the Teknaf area such opportunities are likely to be harder to establish.

Like the equivalent natural leaders forum, since they are amongst the most active and



informed of the women with whom SHOUHARDO II is working, organising the community facilitators and volunteers into a UP level forum, or linking them with groups like the RDRS federations or BRAC's *palli samaj*, could be an initial way of starting a UP level women's forum. Active leaders of EKATA groups could be encouraged to join if they wished. The main point is that the potential future sustainability of the EKATA groups will be helped considerably if SHOUHARDO II can identify some *promising mechanisms* for the groups to establish, or join some kind of union level forum, and then for these to be linked vertically.

#### 4. Engaging Men

The two final areas of short term improvement for the women's empowerment activities in SHOUHARDO II are in their broader engagement strategies for promoting changes in behavior and attitude of men. Two critical institutions to address in this aspect are the VDC and UP. This will help SHOUHARDO II to develop more systematic engagement with men within the villages where SHOUHARDO II is operating.

##### 4a. Village Development Committees (VDC)

The role of the VDCs is vital. All VDCs should be encouraged to have the 6-5 or 5-6 formula split for men and women members, as this provides a sound basis for healthy exchanges between men and women members and leads to a significant change in attitudes of the VDC male members. This balance should be seen as providing the basis for a genuine partnership and



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relationship based on equal respect. There is a need to develop deeper understanding amongst the male members on the benefits and challenges of women's participation in these platforms and ways in which they can play a positive role in supporting women to perform their roles in decision making and setting priorities in these platforms. Both men and women of these platforms need to be equipped with tools, information and messages so that they can continue to reinforce the messages in the community beyond the project period. In the longer run, post-SHOUHARDO II, the UPs remain potentially a key vehicle for continuing to support women's empowerment initiatives. Therefore, it is important to implement similar strategies of working with the male members of UP.

*4b. Promoting women leaders in UPs as support base for other women in communities*

A second area of broader engagement required at the local level with respect to women's empowerment issues, is with the women who have been able to successfully use their potentials and became selected as UP members. So if they have to be a real voice there, they need an active support constituency. Therefore it will be important for SHOUHARDO II to think of ways in which they can become a stronger support base for other women in EKATA and VDCs.

It is for this reason that there is a need for a women's forum and the VDCs to engage more forthrightly with UPs on women's priorities and addressing the inequalities women face, but also for these groups to seek a more inclusive partnership. But they will need more of an incentive and stake than they have at the present.

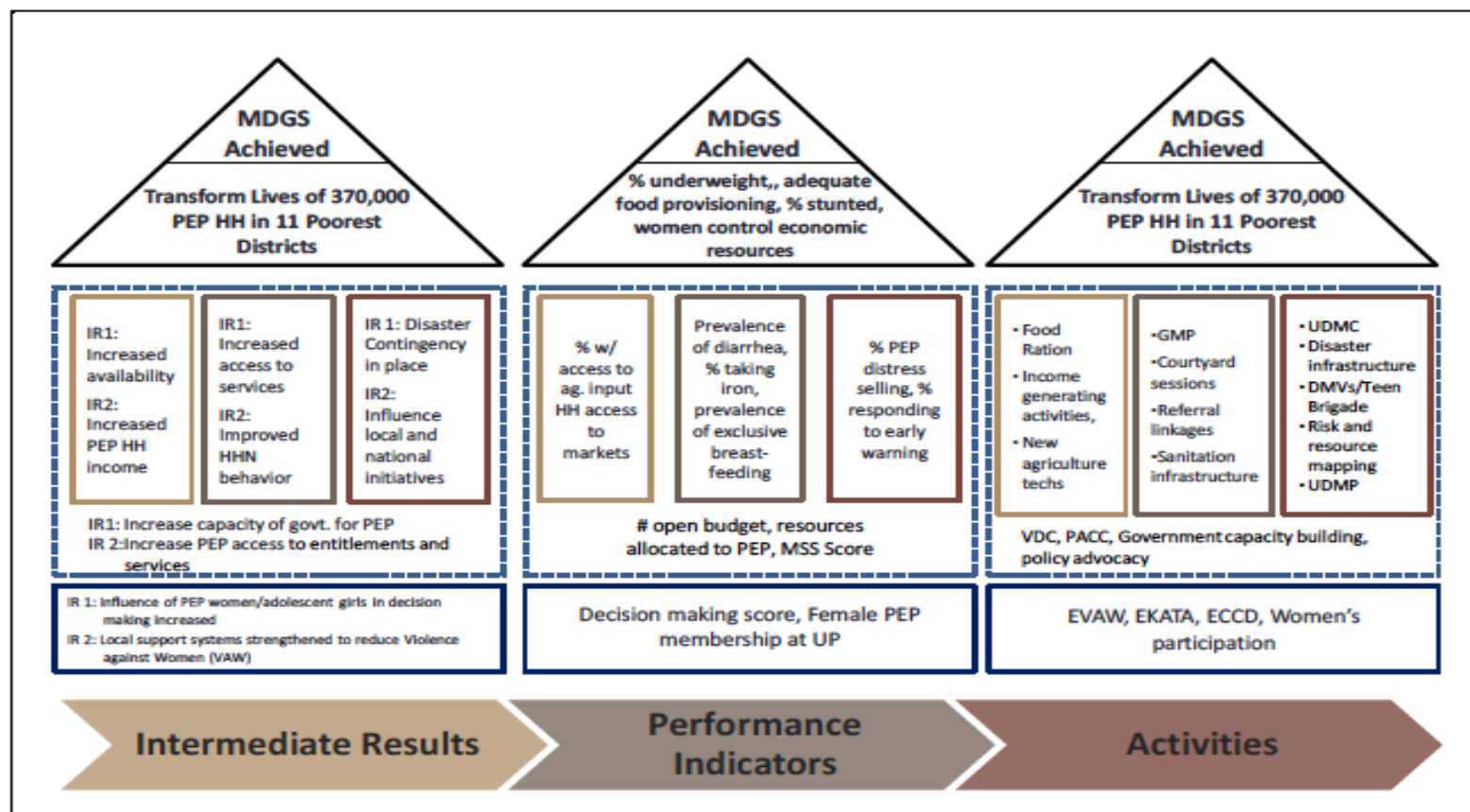
*5. Engaging with national women's movement actors and organisations*

Finally, SHOUHARDO II needs to proactively work alongside the women empowerment program in implementing the national plans of advocacy for CARE Bangladesh. At the national level, with its large, inter-ministerial steering committee, SHOUHARDO II's role is a technical one addressing food security and nutrition issues. This is a continuation – or the starting point – of the project's instrumental approach. Thus at the national level there are really two different things SHOUHARDO II should start doing:

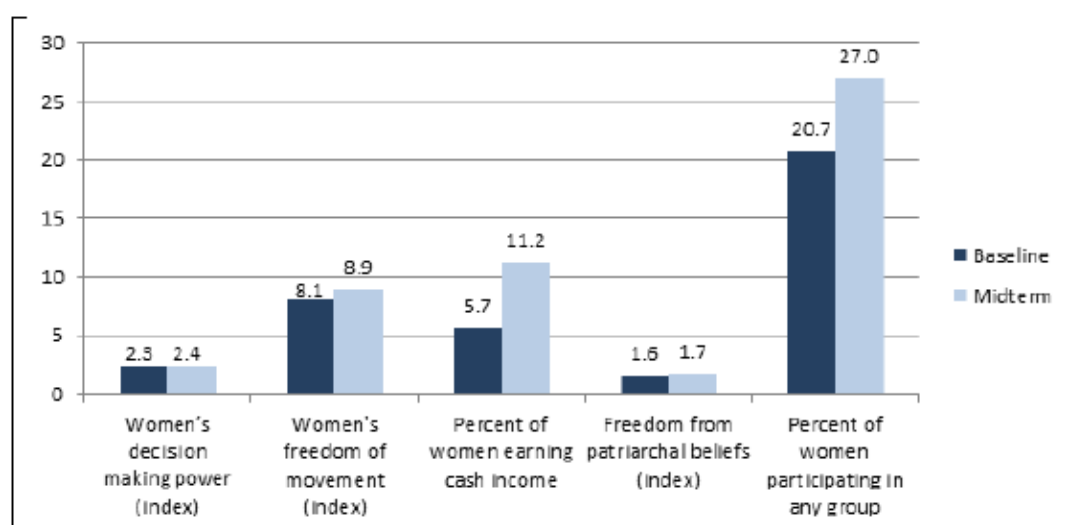
1. Embracing a social justice and gender equality perspective, especially around the key women's empowerment issues that the project is seeking to address.
2. Interact and cooperate with relevant women's movements and organisations, as a basis for being able to leverage more effectively the voice of all the women which SHOUHARDO II is seeking to empower and advance. This is a process. At the moment, there is no agenda that has been generated for SHOUHARDO II to promote or represent yet. However, before SHOUHARDO II is complete, working in conjunction with CARE's women's empowerment program director, it should be possible to establish advocacy positions with regards to the wider promotion of women's empowerment in order to achieve more universal food security and improved nutritional status in Bangladesh.

## Annex: M&E Indicators

Fig 7: SHOUHARDO II 'House' as a Programming and Monitoring Tool





**Fig 8: Indicators of Women's Empowerment****Fig 9: Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index****Table 1—The five domains of empowerment in the WEAI**

Domain	Indicator	Definition of Indicator	Weight
Production	Input in productive decisions	Sole or joint decisionmaking over food and cash-crop farming, livestock, and fisheries	1/10
	Autonomy in production	Autonomy in agricultural production (e.g., what inputs to buy, crops to grow, what livestock to raise, etc.). Reflects the extent to which the respondent's motivation for decisionmaking reflects his/her values rather than a desire to please others or avoid harm	1/10
Resources	Ownership of assets	Sole or joint ownership of major household assets	1/15
	Purchase, sale, or transfer of assets	Whether respondent participates in decision to buy, sell, or transfer his/her owned assets	1/15
	Access to and decisions on credit	Access to and participation in decisionmaking concerning credit	1/15
Income	Control over use of income	Sole or joint control over income and expenditures	1/5
Leadership	Group member	Whether respondent is an active member in at least one economic or social group (e.g., agricultural marketing, credit, water users' groups)	1/10
	Speaking in public	Whether the respondent is comfortable speaking in public concerning various issues, such as intervening in a family dispute, ensure proper payment of wages for public work programs, etc.	1/10
Time	Workload	Allocation of time to productive and domestic tasks	1/10
	Leisure	Satisfaction with the available time for leisure activities	1/10

Source: Alkire et al. 2012.

### **Notes on Indicators**

The first two figures are from SHOUHARDO II's Mid-Term Review, the final figure from the Women's Empowerment Agricultural Index, which USAID is promoting.<sup>11</sup> Appropriate indicators for assessing women's empowerment can vary between contexts depending on the social political culture and recent history. Drawing from the above and the set of recommendations, the below illustrate a set of indicators relevant to SHOUHARDO II's women's empowerment ambitions. Some of these are current indicators, others are not, and others still may be added. Whilst too late for baseline and endline information, some additional indicators may contribute to assessment of changes in the final 18-24 months of SHOUHARDO II. The below are provided as suggestions.

#### **Leadership:**

- Participation in a group
- 'Represents other women's interests' rather than 'Speaking in public' is more appropriate to the process of empowerment

#### **Resources:**

- Changes in ownership of assets is a key indicator for women
- Decision making in relation to assets women own or share, is also important.

#### **Production:**

- Women's participation in household production decisions; and her control over her own particular activities, especially those oriented towards earning an income.
- Women's control over marketing of produce/ goods they have produced.

#### **Agency:**

- Adolescent girls report return to full time education and experience satisfaction with quality
- Women increase food production and/or participation in IGAs.
- Adolescent girls play active role in delaying their own marriage
- Women's mobility increases

#### **Relational indicators:**

- Women acknowledged as having equal rights to men
- Women's ability in groups or individually to initiate actions that challenge existing power relations (whether with regard to economic, social or cultural factors).
- Local support systems strengthened and utilized to reduce VAW
- Women report less incidents of experiencing violence
- Local EKATA groups report linkages with other networks or women's organisations

#### **Structural:**

- Cultural attitudes and practices towards dowry shift
- Women participate as individuals and through representative groups in (local) governance structures

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<sup>11</sup> Esha Sraboni, Agnes R. Quisumbing, and Akhter U. Ahmed, 2013, 'The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index: Results from the 2011-2012 Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey, Dhaka, IFPRI.